

Nelsen helps expand bike patrol program

By Travis Gulbrandson
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While the University Police Department has used mountain bikes to patrol the USD campus since 2005 or 2006, it was a small program for much of that time.

That has all changed now, with eight UPD officers becoming certified to do bike patrols, and the acquisition of three Specialized Rockhoppers equipped with headlights, front suspension and disc brakes.

That gives the department four bikes in all, with a fifth that has yet to be assembled.

"We had the opportunity to really invest in the program, (raise) our numbers, get the extra bikes and gear that we needed to get everybody rolling," said Sgt. Sam Nelsen. "It was always something in the back of our mind, where we really wanted to step it up. It's something we've been working on for quite a few years. It just all came together this year, so to speak, and snowballed."

Nelsen is one of only

two officers in the state to be a certified International Police Mountain Bike Association (IPMBA) instructor, and provided the necessary training at USD.

The class takes a minimum of 32 hours, four days at eight hours per day, he said.

"You start at the very base level and you say, 'This is a bike and this is what it does, and this is how it works, these are the parts of it,' and you just kind of work up from there." Nelsen said. "By the end of the week they're riding down stairs and up stairs and doing tactical maneuvers."

The process of becoming an IPMBA instructor is even more complicated, with a required 40-hour instructor class.

"It's pretty rigorous," Nelsen said. "the first thing we did when we got there was take a test over all the material, and you have to score at least a 90 percent on that material to even continue in the class."

"Then you have to do a basic riding portion that you have to pass right

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away," he said. "That involves just riding some cold courses so that they can make sure they know you know what you're doing."

The rest of the week is filled out with written material, more tests and presentations, he said.

Bike patrols have a lot of advantages, Nelsen said.

"I think the number-one advantage is, officers are a lot more approachable than they are in a car, because they're just riding around campus," he said.

"Obviously, it's a lot easier to get around the inner part of campus on a bike than it is a car. We try to stay off the sidewalks with a car unless it's an emergency. ...

"We do lock-up every night on bikes, too, so you can just ride up to a door

and give it a shake instead of having to drive up to the building, get out of the car, walk up to the door, walk back, sit down, put your seat belt on and drive to the next building," he said.

It's also more eco-friendly and saves money on gas mileage and vehicle maintenance, Nelsen said.

"We just let them go where they want to go," he said.

— A longer article about the University Police Department's use of mountain bikes will be printed in this week's edition of the Vermillion Plain Talk.



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